

## ECA Update: May 15, 2015



### *In this update:*

#### **ECA Weighs in on a Separate Defense Waste Repository**

Today, ECA Chair Chuck Smith wrote to the leaders of the House Energy and Commerce Committee to highlight ECA support for a separate defense waste repository and the role local communities should play as the nuclear waste storage process progresses. The full letter can be read below:

Chairman Fred Upton  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

***RE: Energy Community Support for Development of a Separate Repository for DOE-managed Defense High-Level Radioactive Waste***

Dear Chairman Upton and Representative Pallone:

Upon reading your April 14, 2015 letter to Energy Secretary Moniz, the Energy Communities Alliance (ECA) agrees with most of the concerns outlined in your questions and we believe the U.S. Department of Energy should respond. However, we are also concerned that many of the interests of the local governments and communities that host defense nuclear facilities in the United States are not being fully understood. After years of virtually no movement on the nuclear waste front, the Administration has proposed a path forward to only begin the studies and actions needed to develop a potential repository for defense high-level nuclear waste. We

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July 16-17

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May 22

believe any movement on this issue can be beneficial.

ECA is the only national organization of local, elected and appointed officials in communities adjacent to U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Defense Facilities. Our communities play a key role supporting the country's national security efforts hosting federal national defense sites with the understanding – based on the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA) – that the waste would ultimately be disposed of in a geologic repository. As you are well aware, the development of a geologic repository has not proceeded as planned and our communities now serve as *de facto* high-level nuclear waste storage sites – without a single “consent-based” vote from any community.

Billions of taxpayer and ratepayer dollars have been spent on the Yucca Mountain Project. Despite recent actions by the Administration, current law still requires that a geologic repository be built at Yucca Mountain for the permanent disposal of both defense waste and commercial spent nuclear fuel. ECA supports proceeding with the Yucca Mountain licensing application, but we also support pursuing other options simultaneously in order to begin moving nuclear waste out of our communities in the most expedited manner possible.

Without a geologic repository, defense wastes could remain orphaned in our communities that never planned to be permanent or long-term storage sites. A final geologic repository – whether at Yucca Mountain, WIPP, or elsewhere – is essential to the final disposition of defense waste and integral to the success of DOE's Environmental Cleanup mission. This will not change regardless of decisions made to comingle or separate defense and commercial nuclear waste.

ECA sees advantages to prioritizing defense waste, many based on the differences that exist between legacy defense waste and commercial spent nuclear fuel:

1. Defense waste is older and generally less radioactive than commercial spent fuel.
2. Defense high-level waste has only one disposition path: a geologic repository.
3. There is a smaller, known volume of defense waste. Approximately 2,460 metric tons of heavy metal (MTHM) of high-level waste (approximately 2,150 MTHM defense and 310 MTHM non-defense) is consolidated and stored

mainly at the Hanford site in Washington, the Idaho National Laboratory in Idaho, and at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina — the latter alone has about 4,000 canisters of vitrified high-level waste glass logs ready for disposal.

4. There is an increased risk to human health and the environment the longer we wait to address it.
5. Other DOE missions are affected by the lack of a disposition path for defense waste. For example, further delays will violate legal commitments DOE has with states. Missing milestones, failing to meet deadlines or to honor agreements will adversely affect DOE's Office of Environmental Management's cleanup program.
6. The DOE waste has a different funding source than commercial waste.
7. The Atomic Energy Act of 1954 gives DOE the authority to move forward with defense waste management and disposition.

Our local communities want to see progress from the federal government on moving the high-level nuclear waste to a safe repository, and our communities that potentially want to host a nuclear waste interim facility want funding to analyze the potential of using their site for this mission. Moving forward with the process will lead to lessons learned for subsequent repositories, including how to do consent-based siting and transportation planning. It will allow EPA and NRC to begin to evaluate new regulatory requirements. Most importantly, it can help rebuild trust and public acceptability. Finally, it will not impact the viability of Yucca Mountain.

ECA understands the challenges nuclear waste disposition presents, but there are potential advantages to considering multiple options and pursuing them in parallel. Simply setting a date of 2048 to open a national high-level waste repository does not seem to be a viable option.

We appreciate your work on this important issue and if we can be of assistance and provide additional information, please contact Kara Colton, ECA's Director of Nuclear Energy Programs, at (703) 864-3520 or by email at [kara.colton@energyca.org](mailto:kara.colton@energyca.org).

Sincerely,

Chuck

Smith

Chairman, Energy Communities Alliance and  
Councilmember, Aiken County, SC

